



A Note on the National Pottery, Roseville, Ohio

By James L. Murphy

Ten years ago a review of the history of Roseville's **National Pottery** left unanswered the question of whether the pottery manufactured its own art ware or simply purchased ware from other potteries (notably **Robinson-Ransbottom**) for resale (*Murphy 2001*). National was best known for its earthenware cooking ware, often marked by the large head of a Native American embossed on the base of the ware, and for its yellow ware and Rockingham kitchenware impressed "NATIONAL" on the base. But a variety of more artistic ware is also known to bear the ink-stamped, shield-shaped mark of the **National Pottery**. Whether this fancier ware was actually made by National or not has remained something of a mystery, although most people think that at least some of it was obtained from **Robinson-Ransbottom** (*Murphy 2001a*).

A second possibility is that design ideas were carried from one pottery to another. The *Skillman's* (2001) noted that when the **Pace and Sons Pottery** closed, **Willard Pace** worked for the **National Pottery** before moving to **Robinson-Ransbottom**, where he developed artware lines and decorating patterns into the 1950s (*Skillmans 2001: 7*).

James L. Weaver, Sr., bought the **Pace Pottery** in 1922 and following his death, it was sold by **J. L. Weaver, Jr.**, to the **National Pottery** in December 1925. At that time, **J. L. Weaver** owned 60% of the company and his nephew, **J. Burgess Lenhart**, owned the other 40%. Since about 1918 the Weavers had owned the original **National Pottery**, which

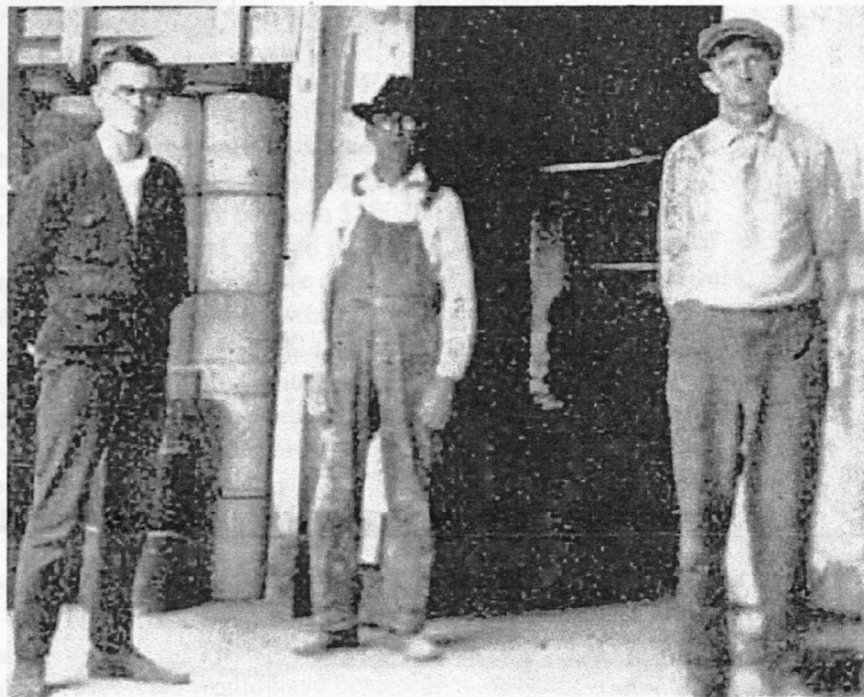


Photo top, J. L. Weaver with brothers Zane and Brent Weaver at the National Pottery in Roseville (*Ceramic Industry* November 1925), photo above left, a National Pottery birdhouse., photo above right, the birdhouse is marked "Patent Pending" and the mark reads "National" and above it the words "Roseville, O." [Photos courtesy of James L. Murphy.



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stood further south on **Elkton Place** (now **Potters Alley**), so they now owned two plants in Roseville. It is possible that **Willard Pace** actually began some of his art ware lines at National and took the ideas with him to **Robinson-Ransbottom**? There is no mention of his work at the **National Pottery** by his son, **Dr. Loren C. Pace** (Pace 2004).

A third possibility is that National did both—marked and resold art ware from **Robinson-Ransbottom** but also produced some of its own. Short of finding a National piece marked under the glaze, this would be very difficult to prove, but the idea is given some substance by a brief article recently discovered in *Ceramic Industry* (5(5): 462).

The photograph on page 1 shows **James L. Weaver, Jr.**, and his brothers **Zane** and **Brent** and must have been taken not long after the death of **J. L. Weaver, Sr.**, “veteran pottery manufacturer,” who passed away July 3, 1924 (*Zanesville Signal* July 5, 1924). According to *Ceramic Industry*, **J. L. (Jr.)** was president and brothers **Zane** and **Brent** were in charge of production at the two plants, **J. L.** devoting most of his time selling, as he was once a “road man” for other potteries. The article states that the enterprise developed when Weaver started buying the product of various potteries, warehousing at Roseville. That led to equipping a pottery and *the production of his own ware*. National manufactured an extensive line of stoneware specialties, a large percentage of which were shipped to the Pacific Coast via the Panama Canal. The company mined its own clay and coal.

Although there is no mention of **J. Burgess Lenhart** in this brief article, he was still active in the business, for in 1928 (*Zanesville Times Recorder* August 24, 1928) it was announced that **J. L. Weaver** and **J. Burgess Lenhart** of Roseville were partnering to mine clay and the manufacture of pottery, the partnership to be known as the **National Pottery Company**. In a few years Lenhart was to become even more active in the **National Pottery**.

That the firm actually made art ware is indicated by the 1938 *Ceramic Trade Directory* (p. 42), which credits it with two plants, one bisque kiln and one glost kiln, making art ware and flower pots (no mention of cookware). Unfortunately, the next older directory, 1933, lists only “Yellow ware and flower pots,” and we don’t know when art ware production was started, if at all.

Interestingly, there is no mention of **J. L. Weaver** after 1933, although the 1938 directory still listed **Lenhart** as general manager. A great deal appears to have happened in those five years, ending with **Lenhart** in control of the company. **J. L. Weaver** left Roseville to live in Zanesville in July, 1936, and the following November the northern Roseville property (Lots 14-16) was offered at Sheriff’s Sale (*Zanesville Times-Recorder*, July 17, 1936, October 22, 1936). Presumably **Lenhart** bought it at this time, though little good came of it, for all the property was sold in a bankruptcy sale in March, 1938, **Lenhart** being the defendant and with “tons of machinery sold under the classification of junk” (*Zanesville Signal* March 4, 1938). So National seems to have been out of business by 1938, but we still do not really know what type of pottery was made at each plant, although it is clear the southern factory made flower pots and probably art ware. Here is an instance where limited archaeological excavations might provide an answer.

Possibly **Lenhart** was responsible for ending the production of cooking ware and wished to concentrate on art pottery. To what extent he was able to do so still remains unknown. Following the end of the **National Pottery**, he resurfaced at the little-known **Stoin-Lee Pottery** in Byesville, moving it in 1944 to Marietta, where it became the **American Pottery Company**. **Lenhart** also was sales manager for the **American Bisque Co.**, across the Ohio River in Williamstown, West Virginia, so he clearly was



interested in more than cooking ware. He retired from American Bisque in 1961 and died in 1983.

As for the **Weaver** brothers, following the demise of the **National Pottery**, **Zane Weaver** was appointed Roseville street foreman in 1938. He served as street commissioner in the late 1930s and early 1940s. **Zane Weaver** died April 13, 1957, and his obituary (April 14, 1957, *Times Signal*) records simply that he had worked as a mold-maker in a number of potteries in the vicinity, moving to Crooksville about 1954.

Brent Weaver in 1920 was a pottery laborer and in 1930 was a jiggerman, presumably at the **National Pottery**, while 16 year old son **Charles** was a truck man at the pottery. When **Brent Weaver** died at the age of 76 (November 30, 1957), the *Times Signal* (December 2, 1957) reported that he had owned and operated three different potteries in Roseville. (One can only wonder which ones they were!) His brother **James** was described merely as a "well known pottery representative of Cambridge."

James L. Weaver, erstwhile president of the **National Pottery**, died April 30, 1964, in Zanesville, remembered only as a salesman for **Crooksville China** and the **A. E. Hull Pottery Company**, with no mention of Roseville's **National Pottery**.

References:

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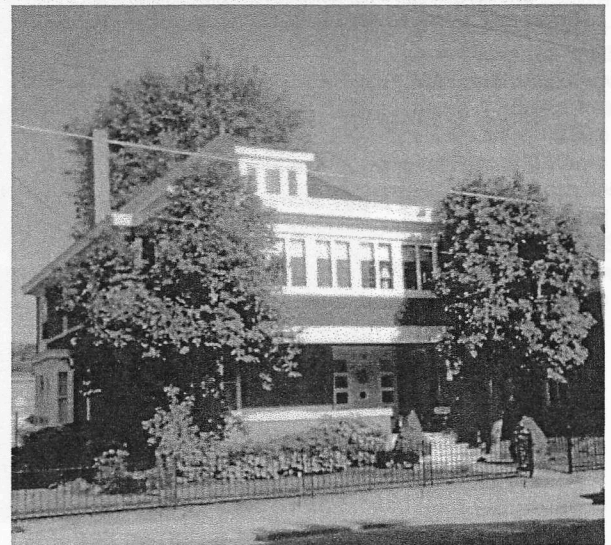
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Roseville's own American Treasures, the Mort Ransbottom House located at 152 N. Main Street and the Edward Ransbottom House located at 99 N. Main Street are on the National Register of Historic Properties. [Photos courtesy of the Roseville Historical Society.]